

Canada-India academic relations: What's next?

Although Canada and India have much shared history and commonality in university organization, the history of Canada-India academic relations is short. Before the early 2000s, there were the Colombo Plan, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. Since then, coinciding with India's rapid rise to world prominence, there has been a parade of government and university delegations, as well as memoranda of understanding addressing exchanges and deeper relationships. This history is summarized briefly below. But how much real relationship actually is there, and who or what is really supporting it? What are the current realities and challenges, and what is the way forward?

THE PAST

Many aspects of Canada's academic relations with India are similar to those of any "Western," especially anglophone, country. India shares a British colonial history with Canada, although its experience differs in some important ways. After Independence in 1947, the pattern of young men travelling to England for university continued, as it did elsewhere in the British Empire. Gradually, some of that traffic shifted to the United States. There was almost no student mobility between Canada and India. Faculty mobility was individual rather than institutional, typically involving Canadians interested in some aspect of India (for example, Sanskrit, religion, anthropology, history, British colonial and military history, or the arts), and Indians interested in Canadian literature, political or legal systems, or colonial history. The two groups seldom shared mutual academic interests, which minimized prospects for direct interaction or longer-term relationships. There was some government funding (for example, the Colombo Plan, the Canadian Studies

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Program, the Commonwealth Scholarship Program, and, from 1968, the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute Fellowships). At this time, the Shastri Institute was based in Calgary, with a subsidiary office in Delhi. Many Indian post-doctoral fellows came to Canada, many in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). However, few Canadians went to India with funding from development programs, which reinforced the view that Canada was a developed country helping India, an un(der)developed country. Canada has never committed to any large-scale academic programs like Fulbright in the United States or DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), so the Canadian government has no "soft power" approach (with respect to India or any other country). The Indian government also did not commit funding beyond what it was receiving as aid. Unfortunately, Canadians generally viewed India as an underdeveloped, poverty-stricken, inefficient, corrupt, disease-ridden Third World country in the Soviet sphere. Coupled with specific political issues after India's 1974 nuclear test (allegedly using material from a Canadian-supplied research reactor), it meant few Canadians had any urge to travel to India. Travel was also time-consuming, difficult, and expensive, with the best season for Canadians to travel to India coinciding with the teaching part of the academic year in Canada, so it was difficult to be away for long

enough to justify the difficulty and expense of the journey. As a result, Canada-India academic relations were minimal and ad hoc.

This began to change in the late 1990s. Relationships broadened, slowly at first and then more rapidly. This happened first through development studies, which then became more broadly construed, going beyond development work into women's issues, environmental concerns, children's rights, literacy education, health and nutrition, and related legal aspects. Much of this, including crucial visits in both directions, was funded by the Canadian government through CIDA; India remains one of CIDA's priority countries. The relationship was still "us" transferring knowledge to "them," whether the transfer occurred in India or Canada. The pressure to broaden fields came from individual researchers rather than from government policy. The Shastri Institute was still the only organization operating in this area; there was little at the institutional level.

Since 2004, interest in India has increased dramatically—partly due to the sudden interest in the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), especially because of increased trade opportunities. Expanded trade requires graduates knowledgeable about these countries, economies, languages, cultures, and ways of life. Canada was fortunate that much demand could be satisfied by the large Indian diaspora resident in Canada, but there was interest beyond the diaspora as connectors. Specifically, in the educational sphere, governments and post-secondary institutions saw possibilities for revenue generation, both directly (through fees) and indirectly (through economic impacts in the communities where international students live and study). Recruitment, though, does not lead to institutional or

Canada-India academic relations, page 6

Canada-India academic relations continued from page 5

research relationships. In fact, at times it can be negative, if an institution thinks that another institution is visiting only to poach its students, often its best students.

EARLY LINKAGES

The Canadian institutions that had early or significant academic and research linkages with India are summarized below. (For a fuller account, see Embleton, 2013.)

York's Schulich School of Business was an early leader in exploring relationships in India. As early as the 1980s, Schulich pursued a global perspective before it was fashionable, with relationships with IIM-Ahmedabad, IIM-Bangalore, and ISB-Hyderabad. These efforts culminated in a Schulich campus in Mumbai (now moved to a purpose-built facility in Hyderabad) for an MBA cohort beginning in January 2010. York University's overall India strategy began with my own work as VP Academic and Provost in the mid-2000s, substantially supported by Dr. Roopa Desai Trilokekar (at the time senior staff in the Associate Vice-President International's Office and now Associate Professor of International Education). This work resulted in relationships with Jadavpur, Jawaharlal Nehru University, IIT-Bombay, BITS-Pilani (including its campuses in Pilani,

Goa, Hyderabad, and Delhi), Madras, and St. Xavier's College (then part of University of Mumbai). These were chosen for reputation, fit with York University, regional distribution, etc., sometimes growing from individual faculty contacts and relationships. Others (for example, law schools) came later, based on similar principles.

Other early entrants between Canada and India included:

- Richard Ivey School of Business (Western University). Professors at Ivey have written up many Indian case studies, which they then use in their instruction and make available to others. Many of these are also disseminated in India. Ivey also does executive education for some major Indian companies.
- Carleton University offered a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) with Koh-i-Noor Business School in Navi Mumbai. From 2010, Carleton began intense engagement—for example, establishing the Canada-India Centre for Excellence in Science, Technology, Trade and Policy, with significant Indian diaspora involvement and fundraising.
- University of Toronto, with the India

Innovation Institute in 2011 (Rotman School of Management, Munk School of Global Affairs), whose current prominence does not match the fanfare and press coverage around its opening.

- Simon Fraser University, with a well-thought-out and appropriate institutional strategy linked to the local diaspora community and fundraising.
- University of British Columbia (UBC), with a Delhi office; IC-IMPACTS (India-Canada Centre for Innovative Multi-Disciplinary Partnership), together with the universities of Toronto and Alberta later winning federal funding through the Canada-India Research Centre of Excellence (CIRCE); and a donor-driven partnership between UBC Nursing and Guru Nanak College of Nursing in Punjab.
- University of the Fraser Valley, offering its BBA, Bachelor of Computer Information Systems, and post-degree Certificate in Management in Chandigarh at an affiliated college of Panjab University, Goswami Ganesh Dutta Sanatan Dharma College; and the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies (founded in 2006 and renamed in 2017 the South Asian Studies Institute), housing the BC Regional Innovation Chair on Canada-India Partnership Development. It should be noted that the Fraser Valley has the highest proportion of people of Indian descent of any Census Metropolitan Area in Canada.
- University of Victoria, partnering with PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia, Delhi), sending significant numbers of students to India for a full academic year, some for individual courses.
- University of Alberta, with an IIT-Bombay partnership in nanotechnology and considerable funding to facilitate mobility to support research projects.
- University of Regina, under a president with her own research interests in India, has strong recruitment in India.



Community Conversation on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Ideology, Philosophy and Teachings with Liberal Arts and Professional Studies, York University and AIM (Dr. Ambedkar International Mission Inc.) on October 6, 2018 (Kaneff Tower, York University).

Canada-India academic relations, page 19

Canada-India academic relations continued from page 6

- University of Saskatchewan, with agricultural research, particularly around pulses and potash, two main drivers of Canada's trade with India.
- University of Winnipeg, with development projects in Punjab, under its former president.
- Colleges, particularly in Ontario, with interests primarily in recruitment. When the Student Partnership Program (SPP) began, there was a sharp rise in Indian students attending Canadian colleges.

The main difference between past and present is that relationships are now generally intended to be long term and, where possible across all disciplines, regulated by formalized agreements, promising both institutional and individual activity, and with both partners contributing and valuing the relationship equally. Although these relationships may be better funded than before, Canada still lags behind other countries in the amount of funding and volume of participation, in terms of both numbers of people and numbers of institutions. Quebec is generally absent, for a number of reasons. The historical connection between India and Quebec is different, and there are language issues as French is rarely studied in India, and few students or professors are willing to study and/or work in French during a research exchange. The exception is in STEM fields, particularly engineering, with relationships at the *École de technologie supérieure* (part of the *Université du Québec*) and the University of Sherbrooke operating in English. Puzzling is the almost complete absence of Atlantic Canada from Indian relationships, despite its overall strength in international recruitment and its need to attract immigrants.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

India is now a destination of choice for Canadian international academic collaborations. It is a rite of passage for presidents and senior administrators to visit India; now they can typically visit existing partnerships. But in the last few

years, many observers of Canada-India relationships have sensed that these relationships are no longer growing in quantity or in breadth and that they are perhaps stagnating. There is little new activity, just plenty of recruiting for fee-paying international undergraduate students. The Canadian government lags far behind (compared to the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Germany, and the European Union, even small countries like Finland) in government support for academic or research relationships. Neither governments nor institutions are giving any support. There is a frequent lack of follow-through, with attendant reputational damage with Indian government officials, senior academic administrators in India, and prospective students (through their extended families and former classmates). Most recently there is lower-than-expected uptake on postgraduate work permits, which enable (most) Indian graduates of Canadian degree programs to apply for work permits in Canada; those who do apply have often not been able to find work and have returned to India. This has been reported in the press, and I have also observed it directly in the experience of sons of close friends in India, who graduated recently from two different Ontario institutions, one in business and one in engineering. Another disappointment has been the belated discovery by some Indian students (for example, when applying to graduate school, in Canada or elsewhere) that Canadian colleges are not universities. This was not something that was clear to them on application, only on graduation.

Some agreements now go beyond single institutions. Ontario Universities International (OUI) manages OIN (Ontario-India, formerly Ontario-Maharashtra-Goa, now including universities in Delhi), announced in 2007 by former Premier Dalton McGuinty in Mumbai. There is Mitacs' Globalink: the pilot program half a dozen years ago was for 20 students, only from Indian Institutes of

Technology (IITs) and only to three BC universities (the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, and the University of Victoria). The program was then expanded to many more students, from a wider variety of high-ranking Indian institutions, and a broad selection of Canadian universities. Globalink now operates in a dozen countries, with students travelling in both directions. Government sponsorship or funding is in many cases broader. In terms of federal support, there is Global Affairs Canada's (GAC's) Science and Technology Agreement (begun when the ministry was known as Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade [DFAIT]). Provincial funding is much less coordinated in Canada than in competitor countries as a result of perennial constitutional issues of federal (research, foreign policy, international trade) versus provincial (education) jurisdiction. These disjunctions are noticed and commented on by India (and other competitor countries), not necessarily because it weakens Canada's competitive position but mostly because it complicates logistics for a foreign entity dealing with Canada. The diversity of funding sources and the need to satisfy provincial or federal governmental agendas have led to broader mandates around research, commercialization, innovation, training, and trade, along with traditional forms of academic collaboration.

THE FUTURE

What do we need in order to achieve better and more extensive academic relationships between Canada and India?

- Better funding for exchanges, partnerships, and travel. Face-to-face contact is required, at least initially and probably at various stages in the development of a solid relationship. Technology can supplement, not substitute for, direct contact. Direct contact is the best way for students to get experience (experiential learning, placements, etc.) and for


Canada-India academic relations, page 20

faculty to discover research synergy.

- More big projects to ignite the imagination, like CIRCE (which as a centre has faded from view, though some of its projects are strong). Projects and problems like “water,” which bring people together across universities, disciplines, and countries, are tremendous connectors. But big projects alone will not suffice. We also need smaller projects and money to fund individuals including students. Canada should step back into funding more of these—for example, through the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. Such projects are currently funded by the Government of India and Shastri’s institutional member fees only.
- Minimal visa restrictions—either no restrictions at all, or longer visas (10 years or more). Currently, people are deterred by the complexity and time involved in getting visas, especially research visas, so they often get a one-time visa for one specific conference or academic visit. To build connections, we need easier travel, sometimes on short notice. Sometimes visas to Canada are the hardest to get for young, highly educated professionals, as there is allegedly the greatest fear that this type of person will seek to remain in Canada rather than return to India. It is not my intent to criticize immigration policy, but simply to point out the tension between current visa policy and the free-flowing mobility of

young, well-educated persons, who can be the lifeblood of academic research and educational relationships.

- More flights to keep costs low and ensure greater availability of seats. Although there have been recent improvements (such as Air Canada’s increased service non-stop to both Delhi and Mumbai from Toronto and from Delhi to Vancouver), more would be beneficial, especially from other major cities in both countries. Additional carriers would keep costs low.
- More shift away from Canadian negative attitudes to India. Outside the Indian diaspora, there is still very little knowledge of contemporary realities in India in the Canadian population. One example is the continuing problem of the Indian three-year bachelor’s degree from reputable institutions not being accepted as a full qualification to enter master’s programs in Canada, despite major efforts and a policy paper led by York a decade ago, showing that the core disciplinary knowledge in such three-year degrees is greater than in four-year degrees from Canada and the United States. If it isn’t a problem for UK graduates, why is it a problem for Indian graduates? There is also much bad press still around sexual harassment and assault in India, which deters many female students and researchers from going to India.

- More live exchanges, with activity measured by people travelling in each direction, not by exchanges on paper with no activity. Maintaining exchanges takes energy and ingenuity, as well as institutional commitment, especially as deans, VPs, and presidents come and go, and memory and commitments are lost. The current number of agreements between Canada and India, often cited to be around 400, is unsustainable, and most are not living agreements, just paper agreements. We need more focus. Each institution is different, so there is no “one size fits all.” Each must find its own agreements, a unique set of relationships and arrangements that work for it, and that could evolve over time.
- A reinjection of some energy and commitment. We need to keep some focus on India even as we all chase new markets around the world, and India is no longer the hottest newest thing. 

REFERENCE

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